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Immigration Attorney Sentenced To 366 Days In Prison

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An immigration attorney from Hartford was sentenced Wednesday to a year and a day in federal prison for falsifying government documents to assist an illegal immigrant along the path to legal residency.

Jose del Castillo, a native of Peru who once served as the chairman of the Hartford Redevelopment Agency, pleaded guilty earlier this year to one count of federal document fraud.

At Wednesday's sentencing hearing before Chief U.S. District Judge Robert N. Chatigny, Assistant U.S. Attorney Douglas Morabito said that what del Castillo did was a "violation of the highest trust that he held." Defense attorney Hope Seeley described her client as a man who had done far more good in his life than bad. And del Castillo, in brief comments, told the court that he had "crossed the line."

In the end, Chatigny sentenced del Castillo, 49, to federal prison for no less than a year and a day. Federal sentencing guidelines called for a sentence of between 12 and 18 months. Chatigny also fined him \$15,000.

"Even the best systems depend very much on the integrity of lawyers," Chatigny said. And, in a reference to del Castillo's comment that he had crossed a line, Chatigny emphasized that "this is a very important line."

"Your conduct involved an abuse of trust," Chatigny said.

Del Castillo was indicted in late 2006 on nearly two dozen counts of document fraud for filing immigration forms with state and federal officials saying that his clients had legitimate job offers as cooks and hosts at Mamacita's at the Forge Restaurant, a Broad Street restaurant that he owned earlier in the decade.

The case against del Castillo goes back to early 2001, when windows in federal law had given illegal immigrants with an employer or family sponsor the chance to pay a \$1,000 penalty, seek a green card while on U.S. soil and possibly achieve citizenship. The process began with the filing of paperwork with the state Department of Labor.

In March 2001, del Castillo opened Mamacita's, his agreement said. On April 30, 2001,

he filed about 100 applications for clients, records from the Labor Department show.

Of those 2001 applications, 14 were for people of various nationalities to work at his Frog Hollow restaurant — nine cooks, five hostesses.

In their indictments, federal prosecutors alleged that several of the applications that del Castillo filed for people to work at Mamacita's were fraudulent. So were applications he filed for clients to work in at least one other area restaurant.

In May, del Castillo pleaded guilty to just one count — knowingly falsifying and filing paperwork for a woman living in Poland to begin the citizenship process without her knowledge or consent. Specifically, del Castillo said that the woman had training as a waitress to work in his restaurant when she did not.

Del Castillo has already been twice reprimanded by the bar counsel's Statewide Grievance Committee. He now faces the possibility of discipline that could affect his ability to practice law, his attorney said.

After the hearing, attorney Joseph Tapper — former chairman of the Connecticut chapter of the American Immigration Lawyers Association — said that Chatigny's sentence was well reasoned, but that it did not take into account the lives of the clients who suffered a possible ban from this country as a result of del Castillo's conduct.